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TERRORISM ATTACK DRILLS

Lihu'e hosts nation's first drive-in bioterrorism clinic



Dennis Fujimoto / The Garden Island

Ben Lastimosa (in vehicle) works with a state Department of Health official in providing his medication needs at the drive-through clinic, Thursday, while the driver of a Regency at Puakea bus (behind) awaits his turn with about 60 residents aboard.

Dennis Fujimoto
THE GARDEN ISLAND

LIHU'E — The nation's first drive-through clinic in response to a bioterrorism threat was established Thursday morning at the Vidinha Stadium parking lot, spearheaded by Kaua'i Civil Defense Agency and state Department of Health Kaua'i District Health Office leaders.

According to a Kaua'i Police Department spokesman who was operating out of the mobile station at the far end of the clinic, the measure was put into effect to dispense medication from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) to a large portion of the Kaua'i population following reports from leaders at local hospitals that a great number of people had developed similar symptoms that may have indicated a bioterror attack.

This was only a drill, not an actual emergency.

The source of their symptoms was traced to a weekend surf meet at Kealia Beach, where two planes were witnessed flying over the area, one trailing smoke. It was later ascertained that the plane was not trailing smoke, but possibly emitting a powdery substance.

About 600 Kaua'i volunteers were

pressed into service to create a sense of realism to the medication-distribution drill, many getting their scenarios when they drove up to the stadium parking lot that had been divided into two sections. The north end was being used to accommodate the line of cars coming in, and the south end was being used as the actual clinic.

Jason McKnight of the state Department of Health Bioterrorism Preparedness Program said the goal of the exercise was to "treat" at least 600 people, and within an hour of starting at 10 a.m., over 400 people had already been treated.

As Shylo Fernandez patiently waited for her family's medications, the call went out for workers to don their masks and gloves, the alarm being triggered after carbon monoxide levels (from the long line of automobiles) surpassed a danger level.

This alarm prompted a slight delay as workers fished through their smocks in search of the necessary gear.

Isolated incidents challenged the distribution process, as when McKnight was called away to tend to a heart-attack victim in one of the drive-through lanes and, late in the distribution process, the KPD SWAT (Special Weapons

And Tactics) team was pressed into service when members of an unruly group got out of their van, with one individual making off with a tray of medication.

This incident ground everything to a halt, as law-enforcement officers including KPD, state Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement personnel, and state sheriffs apprehended the culprit. But, before the distribution could resume, tests had to be done to ensure the purity of the remaining medication.

McKnight, who was the primary information officer during the exercise, explained that when people came through the lines, an initial group of screeners determined if the car's occupants were sick, or simply needed medication.

If they were ill, they were asked to seek medical help elsewhere, and diverted out of the line of cars whose occupants simply needed medication.

Additionally, the task of health-department officials was complicated by cars that contained a variety of individuals, because infants required different types of medication than adults.

See Drive-in, A8